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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [SU](#) [ET](#)
SUBJECT: MELES ON SUDAN: ICC AND U.S. ENGAGEMENT

Classified By: Ambassador Donald Yamamoto for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (S/NF) In a January 30 meeting, Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles told Acting AF Assistant Secretary Phil Carter and AF/SPG Director Tim Shortley that with the expected ICC indictment of Sudanese President Bashir either 1) someone within Khartoum would take advantage of the move to attempt to remove Bashir, or 2) such an attempt will either fail or be aborted. While Meles gave the chances of success for option 1 as nearly zero due to the close knit ties among senior National Congress Party (NCP) officials, he argued that the result would leave the Bashir government a "wounded animal" that is more desperate. Meles argued that to the NCP leadership, their approach is "perfectly rational." He explained that the Government of Sudan (GoS) thought it had moved left bad relations with the U.S. behind when they signed the Naivasha Agreements, only to, in their view, have the USG move the goal posts. As a result, Meles suggested that the NCP believes that the "U.S. will get them one way or the other" and if they see their options as either "to die today or die tomorrow, they will chose to employ delaying mechanisms allowing them to die tomorrow." As such, they have no need to resolve problems with the South because it will bring no benefit to them. Facing such calculus, Meles analyzed the GoS approach as to 1) postpone a vote on the South, 2) buy time in Darfur, and 3) "hope for a miracle in 2011." Meles suggested that if he were the U.S., he would either 1) remove the NCP regime or, if that weren't an option, 2) make clear to the GoS that the U.S. is not out to get it and explicitly lay out what is expected of the GoS on Darfur and the South to avoid continued challenges. End Summary.

DESTABILIZING EFFECTS OF ICC INDICTMENT

2. (C) Prime Minister Meles told Acting A/S Carter that the International Criminal Court (ICC) indictment of Sudanese President Bashir could provide a signal to someone in Khartoum to attempt to remove Bashir through a coup. Although noting that he has been hearing many rumors of such desires from within Khartoum, Meles said that he did not give too much credence to most of these, but highlighted the implications that such rumors have for the climate in Khartoum. Still, Meles argued that such an option, if attempted, would likely have a 100 percent chance of failing due to the close connections and mutual support for one another among senior NCP officials which would suppress any

coup attempt. If Bashir remains in power, either because no such coup attempt is made or an attempt fails, the indictment will leave the Bashir regime a wounded animal that is more desperate than ever.

THE PERSPECTIVE FROM KHARTOUM

13. (C) While acknowledging Carter's point that Khartoum's actions seem to undermine their own long-term interests, Meles argued that from their own perspective, the NCP's actions are perfectly rational. While the "Islamic agenda" may have motivated the regime ten years ago, today they are interested only in money and power, Meles posited. While the GoS thought that they had moved away from a climate of bad relations with Washington when they signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Naivasha, they perceive the United States as having shifted the goal posts on them since. As a result, Meles argued that the GoS believes that "the U.S. will get them one way or the other," and from that perspective, they are already in a corner. Believing they will lose, they perceive no benefit to them of resolving the problems of South Sudan. Instead, Meles argued that the NCP's strategy is to postpone a vote on the South, buy time on Darfur, and "hope for a miracle" in 2011. Seeing the U.S. position leaving them with the options of either "to die today or die tomorrow, they will chose to employ delaying mechanisms allowing them to die tomorrow."

14. (C) Meles was explicit that the GoS does not trust the United States, but acknowledged that "to some extent they are

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immune to" a rational discussion with clear benchmarks that allow them an out. Still, Meles claimed that the GoS has suggested that if they get a way out, they may take it. While acknowledging that the GoS "may try to string (the U.S.) along," Meles argued that the real issue is whether there is a possibility of U.S.-NCP negotiations. If that is an option, Meles advised, it could lead to rational discussions.

ETHIOPIA'S ADVICE FOR MOVING FORWARD

15. (S/NF) Meles offered that if he were the United States, he would look at two options. First, which he clearly conveyed as the preferred choice, would be to "remove the Bashir regime." Acknowledging that such an option was unlikely, Meles advocated for making a clear representation to the GoS that the United States is not/not "out to get them" and laying out clear benchmarks of actions expected of the GoS on both Darfur and South Sudan that would be necessary to "avoid continued challenges" with the U.S. Meles concluded the discussion by highlighting that "they don't trust the Obama Administration," and "they trust the Obama Administration less than the Bush Administration," and with a clear reference to U.S. Ambassador to the UN Susan Rice and former Senior NSC Director for Africa Gayle Smith "...especially some friends of mine."

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